

SERVICE PLAN

Fiscal Years 2014/2015 - 2016/2017

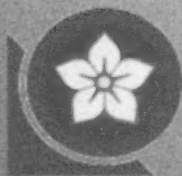


Office of the Ombudsperson

Presented to the

**Select Standing Committee on
Finance and Government Services**

December 6, 2013



mbudsperson

B.C.'s Independent Voice For Fairness

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Message from the Ombudsperson

“The role of British Columbia’s Ombudsperson is to receive and investigate complaints of administrative unfairness from individuals and to generally oversee the administrative actions of Provincial public authorities to enhance openness, transparency and accountability.”¹

This Service Plan 2014/2015 - 2016/2017 is based on the Office of the Ombudsperson Strategic Plan 2010 - 2014. It builds on the initiatives and successes outlined in the Ombudsperson Annual Report 2012 - 2013 and it is also aligned with the accompanying budget proposal.

2012/2013 was a busy and productive year for the Office of the Ombudsperson. Approximately 7,500 inquiries and complaints were responded to by providing information, assistance, appropriate referrals or conducting early resolutions or investigations.

The office issued two systemic reports. One on adult guardianship titled “*No Longer Your Decision*” resulted in not only improvements to existing processes but also to regulatory and legislative change. The other report was our first “preventative ombudsmanship” team report, “*Open Meetings: Best Practices Guide for Local Governments*”. This report took lessons learned from investigating individual complaints of local government meetings being improperly closed and identified best practices for local governments to avoid problems and reduce concerns and complaints. Its publication also led to a number of presentations to local governments about this issue. In addition, significant public interest in our report on home and community care for seniors, “*The Best of Care, Part 2*” continued throughout 2012/2013. It led to invitations from across the province to speak about the report and its findings and recommendations.

Our office played an active role in the broader Ombudsman community, presenting the British Columbia model of systemic investigations to an international audience at the United States Ombudsman Association annual conference.

As well, the office continued with its outreach initiatives. In a tour of the Greater Vancouver/Lower Mainland, the “Ombudsperson Office for the Day” was opened in several different locations which were designed to be particularly accessible to communities whose members are new to British Columbia or whose first language is not English.

To date, the progress made in 2012/2013 has continued in fiscal 2013/2014. Complaints and investigations are at a similar level to last year, which is allowing us to continue to focus on completing individual investigations in a timely fashion. Currently the office is on track to complete two systemic investigations and progress is being made on initiatives identified in last years’ Service Plan.

Looking ahead to 2014/2015, which marks the 35th anniversary of the Office of the Ombudsperson in British Columbia, I anticipate that our office will continue to enhance administrative fairness, openness, transparency and accountability in public administration in British Columbia.

¹ Special Committee to Appoint an Ombudsperson Report May 2012 page 1

Vision, Mandate and Guiding Principles

Legislative Framework

Ombudsperson Act

Vision

British Columbia's Independent Voice for Fairness

Mandate

To ensure that every person in British Columbia is treated fairly in the provision of public services; to promote and foster fairness in public administration; and to uphold the democratic principles of openness, transparency and accountability.

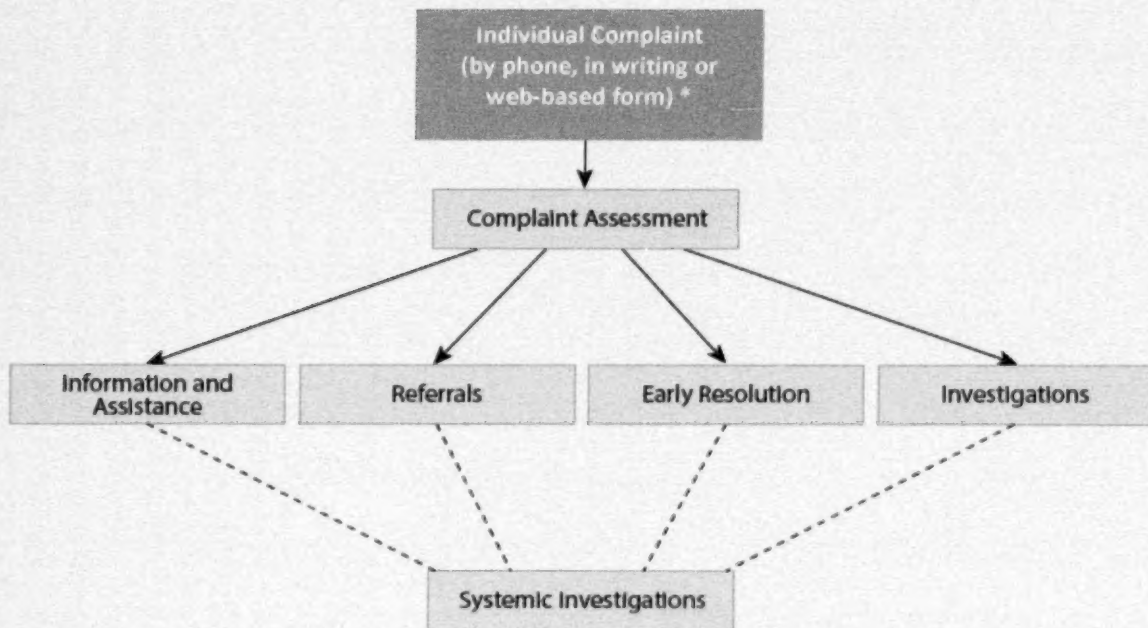
Guiding Principles

Continuous Improvement, Equality, High Quality Service, Integrity, Leadership, Respect, Teamwork, Trusting Environment

How We Do Our Work

Ombudsperson Activities

The work of the office is carried out through an integrated process of intake, referral, early resolution, individual investigations and systemic investigations.



*The Ombudsperson can also initiate an investigation

Shared Service Activities

The Office of the Ombudsperson provides support to four Offices of the Legislature through a compact Shared Service support organization. These shared support services include finance, human resources, facilities and IT services.

Service Plan Structure

The Office of the Ombudsperson 2010 - 2014 Strategic Plan sets out our strategic goals as:

- Enhancing Understanding of the Principles of Good Governance
- Ensuring Administrative Fairness
- Providing Quality Service
- Supporting a Workplace of Excellence

It also identifies the key success factors that demonstrate we are making progress towards those goals as:

- Increased public and stakeholder awareness and understanding of administrative fairness
- Thorough and timely investigations
- Improved administrative fairness through focused, relevant recommendations and changes in actions, practices, policies and procedures
- Maintaining a healthy workplace environment

Those success factors have resulted in specific performance indicators that are measured in our performance matrix.

Included in this Service Plan is our performance measurement results for 2012/2013; an interim report on progress on 2013/2014 initiatives; planned activities for 2014/2015; and a projection for 2015/2016 and 2016/2017.

In looking past 2014/2015, it should be kept in mind that the new strategic plan, which will be developed in 2014 to cover the 2015 - 2019 timeframe, will likely influence both the goals and indicators for subsequent years.

2012/2013 Performance Measures

Performance Measures Matrix				
Strategic Goal	Outcome	Key Performance Indicator	Target	2012/2013
Enhance Understanding of Principles of Good Governance	Increased public and stakeholder awareness of administrative fairness and role of Ombudsperson Office	% increase in website use	10%	4%
		Deliver presentations on administrative fairness	30	65
		Conduct outreach tours	2	1*
Ensure Administrative fairness	Useful Systemic Reports	Reports identify key problem areas and provide useful recommendations	2 reports	2 reports
		Report out on status of implementation of recommendations made in systemic reports	100%	100%
Provide Quality Service	Timely access to office	% of calls answered within 45 seconds	80%	85%
	Timely completion of investigation	% of investigative files completed and closed within 3 months of acceptance of complaint	70%	57%
		% of investigative files completed and closed within 6 months of acceptance of complaint	85%	77%
Support a Workplace of Excellence	Highly skilled staff	% of staff who receive professional training	90%	84%

*Additional outreach was conducted in response to requests from across the province to speak to seniors' groups about *The Best of Care* and associated reports.

2013/2014 Interim Report on Performance

There has been progress made on the following initiatives identified in last years' Service Plan:

1. *Evaluate the Early Resolution Program* - a draft report has been completed that identifies potential for expanding this program on a trial basis for 2014/2015.
2. *Increased Contact with Underserved Communities* - a second Ombudsperson tour in the Greater Vancouver area in 2013/2014 focused on providing information and services to newer members of our communities whose first language is not English and the agencies who assist them.
3. *Reduce the Delay in Commencing Individual Investigations* - since 2008/2009 the Office of the Ombudsperson has been working to reduce the file awaiting assignment list and increase the number of investigations that are concluded within 90 days. Our current focus is on building on the progress made in these two areas in 2012/2013.
4. *Developing a Preventative Ombudsmanship Program* - progress on this initiative is being made in two areas. One is a continuing interest on the part of local governments in discussing the *Open Meetings Best Practices Guide*. The second is an openness on the part of several ministries to engage with this office as they change existing programs or develop new ones in order to avoid potentially administratively unfair practices.
5. *Leadership Role in Ombudsman Community* - the office developed and delivered a one-day workshop on Systemic Investigations for the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman annual conference. The office participated in the delivery of the first Canadian Ombuds Certificate course run by the Forum of Canadian Ombudsman/Osgoode Professional Development.

2014/2015 Goals, Priorities and Initiatives

In looking ahead to 2014/2015, our strategic goals will remain the same. In a context of projected consistency in service numbers (7,500 +/- inquiries and complaints and 1,900 +/- early resolutions and investigations) the priorities for 2014/2015 are:

- Maintain a high level of responsiveness at initial contact
- Expand our early resolution program on a trial basis
- Reduce files awaiting assignment
- Increase the number of investigations completed within 90 days
- Expand public reporting on positive changes in public administration arising out of Ombudsperson Office investigations
- Further development of preventative ombudsmanship activities

The proposed initiatives and indicators for 2014/2015 are set out under the related strategic goal.

Goal 1 - Enhance Understanding of Principles of Good Governance

This strategic goal is designed to both improve service delivery by public agencies and to ensure that individuals who can benefit from the services of the Office of the Ombudsperson are aware of the office, the services it provides, and how to access them.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will enhance understanding of good governance and the role of administrative fairness in effective public administration through effective online and in-person outreach activities.

Initiatives 2014/2015:

- Enhance consultation with senior decision makers about areas of concern
- Update website to provide more information and better access to underserved communities
- Focus at least one outreach tour on underserved communities

Key Indicators: 10% increase in website use; 30 presentations; 1 outreach tour focused on underserved communities

Goal 2 - Ensure Administrative Fairness

The fundamental rationale for the *Ombudsperson Act* and the operations of the office is to ensure that people who believe they have not been treated fairly by provincial public authorities have somewhere to turn to that can independently and impartially investigate to determine if that is the case and, if so, to propose a fair resolution. While the majority of the work completed in this area is done in the course of individual investigations, all business areas from Intake to Systemic Investigations have a role to play in ensuring administrative fairness.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will focus on identifying and fully utilizing the most effective mechanisms to ensure administrative fairness.

Initiatives 2014/2015:

- Expand “preventative ombudsmanship” activities
- Assess selected internal resolution processes for appropriateness and efficacy
- Expand monitoring of implementation of fair resolutions
- Examine mechanisms to enhance the usefulness of systemic reports

Key Indicators: 2 systemic reports; 100% reporting on status of implementation of recommendations

Goal 3 - Provide Quality Service

This is a goal that requires internal focus. The Office of the Ombudsperson must model the administrative fairness principles it espouses even when facing constraints and challenges. To do so effectively, the office needs to seek out new processes and technologies to allow it to most effectively deliver positive outcomes.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will maintain a high-level of responsiveness to complainants and improve tools to assist in timely completion of investigations.

Initiatives 2014/2015:

- Trial of expanded Early Resolution Program
- Expansion of scanning and electronic based files
- Commence process to upgrade or replace Case Tracker System

Key Indicators: 80% of calls responded to within 45 seconds; 70% of investigations completed within 3 months

Goal 4 - Support a Workplace of Excellence

The Office of the Ombudsperson is a demanding, changeable environment in which to work. Call coordinators, complaints analysts and investigators must deal on an ongoing basis with upset or distraught callers and visitors. Shared Service staff must balance the service demands of four different offices. Our office depends on the professionalism and dedication of our staff and it is important that they perceive the Office of the Ombudsperson to be a workplace of excellence.

The Office of the Ombudsperson will provide a workplace where staff can develop their professional competences and careers.

Initiatives 2014/2015:

- Develop 2015 - 2019 Strategic Plan
- On-going professional training for all staff
- Identifying and providing opportunities for change and advancement within the office

Key Indicators: Completion of 2015 - 2019 Strategic Plan; 90% staff receiving professional training

2015/2016 and 2017/2017 Strategic Direction

The Office of the Ombudsperson's strategic direction in 2015/2016 and 2016/2017 will be to increase the effective use of technology; to provide the most effective and timely resolutions to individual complaints; to increase public and stakeholder engagement; and to develop an effective "preventative ombudsmanship" program.

It is anticipated that the upgrade or replacement of the Case Tracker System will require an increase in the capital budget which may affect these fiscal year budget projections.